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PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD
By Edward Neilan

It's time to close intelligence gap

Near the top of the advance list of issues for the 1988 presidential campaign will be "intelligence and counterintelligence failures".

Or, to put it more politely, the listing might be called "how to improve United States intelligence and counterintelligence measures."

Foreign spies had a banner year, at our expense, in 1985. Names like Pollard, Walker and Chin were grim reminders of a counterintelligence effort in disarray.

Vitaly Yurchenko, The Spy Who Came in From Fredericksburg, raised a lot of questions about security and handling of defectors when he walked out of a Georgetown restaurant without finishing his after-dinner coffee.

Allan E. Goodman, associate dean of the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, says the quality of intelligence provided by the community (CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, the military service and special collection offices in the Pentagon, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Treasury Department's Office of Intelligence Support, the FBI, and a bureau of the Department of Energy) has been seriously questioned for some time.

"There have been at least 30 alleged intelligence failures investigated by Congress or by the press since 1960," Mr. Goodman wrote in an article "Dateline Langley: Fixing The Intelligence Mess," which appeared in the Winter 1984-85 issue of Foreign Policy magazine.

The article ruffled so many feathers at the CIA that a CIA spokesman broke the usual policy of silence to rebut several of the allegations.

Evidence suggests that the situation has worsened, rather than improved, over the past year.

As early as 1981, the Reagan administration knew it had intelligence problems. The disappointment was underlined by Adm. Bobby Inman, a senior career military intelligence officer and deputy director of central intelligence until 1982, who told several forums that the U.S. intelligence community was at its lowest level since Pearl Harbor.

After the bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, President Reagan talked about the "near destruction of our intelligence capability." Spokesman Larry Speakes said the situation was due to "a decade-long trend of a climate in Congress that resulted in inadequate funding and support for intelligence gathering capabilities."

Such criticism and demands for soul-searching should be taken seriously by intelligence and foreign policy professionals, even though it may be obvious that some of the criticism is highly politicized.

Many of our best intelligence specialists and spies have left the profession mumbling that the community has become too fragmented and lacking in central coordination.

Soviet behavior and capabilities — the priority target in the intelligence field — have frequently been misjudged by American intelligence. The U.S. was in error on the Soviet threat to American U-2 reconnaissance flights in 1960, did not predict Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's placing of offensive missiles in Cuba in 1962, missed on naming Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov as successsors to Mr. Khrushchev and misjudged the level of Soviet defense spending.

Military failures included the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950, the risk to the USS Liberty of Israeli air attack if the ship continued surveillance during the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, the risk to the USS Pueblo of its spy mission off the North Korean coast, the Argentine seizure of the Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) and others.

The press sniffs out the failures of the intelligence community and is less likely to pounce on the successes. But there is enough noise being made on the politicizing of the community and of the need for more centralization that corrective measures should be taken now rather than waiting for the next big failure to predict a military attack or for the next Yurchenko to walk away before finishing his coffee.

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